

# Healthy Northern Communities Forum: Highlights

North Central Local Government Association Annual General Meeting & Convention 2023

## Summary

This is a summary report of the Healthy Northern Communities Forum in Dawson Creek on May 8, 2023. 40 representatives from communities across Northern Health's [Health Service Delivery Areas](#) gathered to discuss the ways that communities and health authorities can work together to improve health and well-being. Top community health priorities this year were food security, harm reduction, mental health, and community connections. We invite you to work with us on your priorities to improve community health and well-being.

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## Background

Since 2017, the annual **Healthy Northern Communities Forum** has provided opportunities for representatives from the health authority, local government, and other partner organizations to discuss and plan action on policy and program ideas that address the realities of northern BC communities. The 2023 Forum was divided into two workshops:

**Workshop #1: Health Human Resources.** Purpose: 1) to share information about provincial strategy, Northern Health (NH) strategic priorities and initiatives, and case studies illustrating community involvement; and 2) to host interactive discussions and develop action plans for childcare, housing, and community connectedness.

**Workshop #2: Healthy Communities.** Purpose: 1) to share information about Population and Public Health's approach to supporting healthy community development; and 2) to host interactive discussions about the features of healthy communities, and how to best build partnerships between communities and NH to advance community health and well-being.

## Workshop #1: Health human resources

The following tables summarize the successes and challenges communities are experiencing concerning childcare, housing, and community connectedness.

### Successes

Childcare	Housing	Community connectedness
Provide childcare spaces via user agreements and partnerships	Build senior housing in some communities	Organize the Adventures in Health Care program: tour for high school students
Pilot childcare facilities with extended hours		Provide a “red carpet” welcome to new staff
Offer Early Childhood Educator remote education		Organize student fairs with healthcare focus
Provide \$10 dollar per day childcare spaces		Work with grocers to offer culturally preferable foods
		Access to dual credit courses and pathway programs for students
		Offer recreation opportunities
		Plan age-friendly outdoor spaces

### Challenges

Childcare	Housing	Community connectedness
Limited available childcare spaces, especially for infants and toddlers	Lack of affordable rentals, especially senior’s housing	Lack of access to reliable internet cell service
Limited affordable childcare options	Challenges to zoning options	Lack of transportation options in and between communities
Limited childcare options with flexible hours (no weekend or overnight/evening care)	Lack of supportive housing	Limited in-community post secondary options and not enough remote options for post-secondary learning
Not enough qualified staff, especially childcare staff	Lack of contractors to build new buildings	Spouses or family members cannot find work
Limited options to open new childcare locations	Not enough staffing resources to address housing shortages	Changes to the economy: closures in mining and forestry

## Workshop #1: Moving forward

The following is a list of commitments workshop attendees made to support health sector challenges in childcare, housing, and community connectedness.

Topic	Participants' responses
<b>Childcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support NH to create childcare/support advocates for childcare</li> <li>• Think outside the box for solutions</li> <li>• Recognize the needs of current and future employees and advocate for rotations that are more attractive and flexible</li> <li>• Bring together interested parties to discuss potential solutions</li> <li>• Collaborate with school districts</li> <li>• Use training incentives and grow your own industry/school</li> </ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support NH to create a mobile fleet of tiny homes</li> <li>• Partner with Municipality, Regional District, First Nations Health Authority to setup a combined housing inventory</li> <li>• Better understand the family unit needs when healthcare professionals come into the community</li> <li>• Support NH to create fleet of electric bikes/vehicles for new staff</li> <li>• Work with other community partners to help promote affordable temporary and permanent housing</li> <li>• Continue to work within our community to focus on families and development opportunities. Partner with schools for childcare and recreation.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Connectedness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to engage high schools to grow our own and keep people coming back to work, live, and play</li> <li>• Create community-based groups to support new staff. Host area events, create volunteering opportunities, sponsor community recreation and update current assets</li> <li>• Increase partnerships</li> <li>• Positively market the community to potential health care workers.</li> <li>• Be an ambassador for our community and offer to help with recruitment and welcome new health care workers to our community</li> <li>• Keep and broaden inter-community dialogue</li> <li>• Create electric bike/vehicle fleet for use by new employees</li> </ul>

## Workshop #2: Healthy communities

**Part 1:** Presentation: Co-Producing Healthy Northern Communities (attached to this email). Review this presentation to learn more about the Northern Health Healthy Settings team and how we work with municipalities and share with others in your organization to build common understanding of healthy community development.

**Part 2:** Interactive group activity to identify community health priorities and community assets. Use the assets identified for each priority to start planning collaborative action in your community.



*Images (above): participants engaging in dialogue about community health and well-being priorities.*

## Workshop #2: What we learned

Participants identified several key community health priorities:

- Food security
- Harm reduction
- Mental health
- Community connections

Using the [Asset-Based Community Development](#) (ABDC) model, participants identified gifts and strengths (assets) for the above priorities and explored ways to work together to benefit their communities.

Community health priority: **Food security**

<b>Asset grouping</b>	<b>Participants' responses</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers' market providers and farmers</li> <li>• Volunteers</li> </ul>
<b>Associations and clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches/community meal programs/food banks</li> <li>• Farmers' markets (low-income coupon programs)</li> <li>• Rotary club (Starfish club backpack)</li> <li>• Meals on Wheels programs</li> <li>• 4-H Club</li> </ul>
<b>Local institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm to table with some districts</li> <li>• Retail grocery carrying local produce and products</li> <li>• School-based food programs</li> <li>• Culinary arts programs</li> <li>• Local stores</li> </ul>
<b>Places and land-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community greenhouses and gardens</li> <li>• Traditional plants nursery</li> <li>• Fishing/hunting/foraging skills</li> </ul>
<b>Connections and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skeena Diversity organization for newcomers and refugees</li> <li>• Fall fairs</li> <li>• Community smokehouses/cold storage</li> </ul>

Community health priority: **Harm reduction**

<b>Asset grouping</b>	<b>Participants' responses</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Friends and family</li> </ul>
<b>Associations and clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Churches</li> <li>• Northeast Native Advancing Society (NENAS)</li> <li>• Community Action Teams (CATs)</li> <li>• Peer groups</li> </ul>
<b>Local institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homeless shelters</li> <li>• Sharps disposals</li> <li>• Harm reduction vending machines</li> <li>• Naloxone training</li> <li>• Organizations: Salvation Army &amp; North Winds Treatment Facility</li> </ul>
<b>Connections and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spread correct information and decrease stigma</li> <li>• First Nations community programs</li> </ul>

Community health priority: **Mental health**

<b>Asset grouping</b>	<b>Participants' responses</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers</li> <li>• Healthcare providers</li> <li>• Health professionals</li> </ul>
<b>Associations and clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community cards for individuals without a social network</li> <li>• Sobriety organizations (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)</li> <li>• Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD)</li> <li>• Local sports associations</li> </ul>
<b>Local institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library: cognitive care kits for dementia, games night/youth programs, monthly large events, seniors' chair yoga, etc.</li> <li>• Respite programs</li> <li>• Terrace &amp; District Community Services Society: mental health supports</li> <li>• Friendship Centres</li> </ul>
<b>Places and land-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation options: trails, disc golfing, pickleball, skateboard parks, dog parks, camping</li> <li>• Cultural options: land-based healing</li> <li>• Natural environment: nature, ocean, beaches, parks</li> </ul>
<b>Connections and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic stability</li> <li>• Community events: art shows, car shows, cultural camps</li> </ul>

Community health priority: **Community connections**

<b>Asset grouping</b>	<b>Participants' responses</b>
<b>Individuals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer networks (e.g., Meals on Wheels)</li> <li>• Post office (Granisle)</li> <li>• Former mayors</li> </ul>
<b>Associations and clubs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service clubs</li> <li>• Adopt-a-Senior</li> <li>• Cycling Club</li> <li>• Seniors' Club</li> <li>• Cross country ski/Nordic club</li> <li>• Better at Home program</li> <li>• Lion's Club</li> <li>• Gun Range Club</li> <li>• Citizens on Patrol</li> <li>• Brownies, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts</li> </ul>
<b>Local institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries</li> <li>• Native Friendship Societies</li> <li>• Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• Northern Health</li> <li>• Emergency service providers/BC Ambulance/paramedics</li> </ul>
<b>Places and land-based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community gardens</li> <li>• Community forests</li> <li>• Boat access/lakes</li> <li>• Golf facilities</li> <li>• Biking/walking trails</li> <li>• Camping/fishing/hunting</li> <li>• Parks and green spaces</li> </ul>
<b>Connections and culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous groups/communities</li> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Arts community</li> <li>• Faith-based communities</li> </ul>

Participants shared what they learned from Workshop #2:

- “The North needs to stick together and work on the big issues together”
- “The Healthy Communities E-Brief”
- “New ways to think about our strengths”
- “Lots of positive things happening across the north”
- “Community health actionable priorities”

Participants shared actions that they will take after attending Workshop #2:

- “Strengthen partnerships”
- “Connect with NH resources and Healthy Settings Advisor”
- “Talk to community groups”
- “Subscribe to the Healthy Communities E-Brief”
- “Appreciate more of the local community health initiatives”

## Connect with us

To connect with the Workforce Sustainability (Health & Human Resource) team, email [NHWFS@NorthernHealth.ca](mailto:NHWFS@NorthernHealth.ca).

To connect with the Healthy Settings team, visit our [webpage](#) to find contact information for your local Healthy Settings Advisor.

NH’s [Community Granting webpage](#) outlines the various funding opportunities.

The NH Healthy Communities E-Brief is a monthly newsletter sharing resources, learning opportunities, and grant funding opportunities that support community health in Northern BC. Past editions are found on the [E-Brief and Updates webpage](#).



*Image (above): Healthy Settings Advisors at the NCLGA trade show*

To subscribe to the E-Brief, send a blank email to [healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca](mailto:healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca) with “subscribe” in the subject line.

Whether or not you attended the Healthy Northern Communities Forum, we invite you to connect with the Healthy Settings team to learn more about how applying Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) concepts can improve health and well-being in your community.